

## Two Months in a Gipsy Camp.

By OLIVIA M. PHELPS.



ONCE in a lifetime the primeval creature breaks loose from the shackles of conventional every-day life, and clamors for its original environment. The most of us give heed to the feeling, but in a half-hearted way which brings little or no surcease from that insistent "call of the wild" which nearly every man knows.

Fate intervened when I was weary of the commonplace, and in a single night I was transported to another age, to a life far removed from the

clamour of a nineteenth century town. Passing through the city was a gipsy caravan. A few minutes' talk with the zam-zas, the clink of silver, a change of dress, and the transformation was made. In two hours' time I had bridged the distance that lies between the then and the now. I was back among nearly aboriginal conditions, and after the first night on the road I decided to live the life of the stroller for the next two months, free from baths, save such as nature provides, far from the daily newspapers and mails, and with the songs of birds for a morning a them and an evening chant.

The next morning at daylight our camp was astir. By nine o'clock we were moving from the village. With us were nine lean, spavined horses that should have been turned out to grass and left to end their days in some green pasture.

"No matter," said the chief; "you will see. In two months it will be different."

Parenthetically, I wish to say that it was truth the old man spoke, for when I left them a few weeks later, they had sixteen specimens of good horseflesh obtained by trading. First, a horse blind on one eye for one that visually was sound, but had the distemper. He was exchanged for one that was slightly lame, the gipsy taking the chance of his safe recovery. And so on, always bettering by the exchange.

We did not remain in one place over a week. Migratory in character, it is impossible for the true Zingaro to assume stability. Each camp is governed by a chief, who, in turn, is under the obedience of the Komava, the ruler of the United States, who is in communication with the real Queen, now about ninety-six years of age and living in Rumania. How intercourse

is conducted I have been unable to ascertain, but I know that once each year her commands are received, and are transmitted to each Komava. Possibly Mr. Walter Patrick, of England, who is the only student of gipsy life and customs of whom I know, might throw light on the question.

The gipsies have many celebrations. I do not use the word holidays, for the entire summer is one long holiday to them. But in America they observe the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and of latter years Labor Day with the same zest as we do. It is the same in any country where their home may chance to be.

A little description of the occupa-



Preparing the Autumn Feast.

tion of one summer's day will serve to briefly show the habits and customs of the gipsy. They arise very early, and breakfast, as a meal at which all sit, is unknown to them. The women prepare the food as it is wanted. After breaking the fast the men, with the exception of the chief and one of the younger men, disperse to the country around, trading horses, stealing eatables, or if the camp be near a town, sending "gringos" to the camp, where the older women, and oftentimes one or two of the younger ones, are waiting to tell fortunes if their palms are properly crossed. The old men are often employed in basket-making, constructing many beautiful articles of birchwood. The young women divide the outlying country into districts, each to be traversed by one, and occasionally two of them. They will ask for anything they happen to want with a guilelessness which seldom fails of bringing to them the coveted article. Old dresses, hats, shoes, anything which can be either worn or sold—bread, doughnuts, or any baked stuff that may be on hand. If they fail in getting anything it will unquestionably be, "Have your fortune told, pretty lady?" varying the adjective with the person addressed.

They can coax, cajole, wheedle, and if that does not bring the desired result, can storm and threaten until one yields, rather than longer listen.

The gipsy man in love is an interesting study. No languid, neurotic beauties for him. He wants a girl of his own people, who is learned in the art of extracting shekels from the unwary. She must be strong and healthy. He appraises her very much as

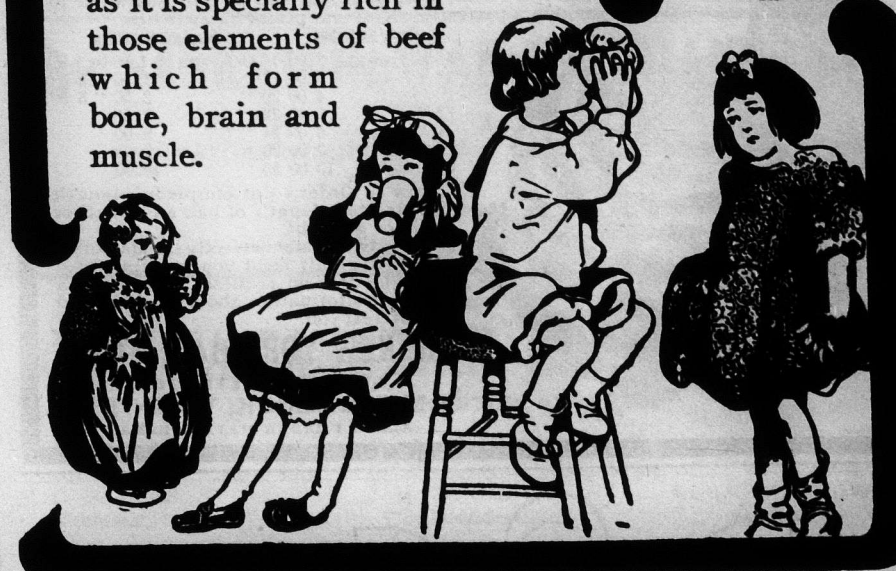


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